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In 2021 the Environment Act was passed, providing a framework for consistent recycling collections, including weekly food waste collections, along with extended producer responsibility and moves towards circularity.

9. 2015-17 Cutting plastic waste

Waste is a global problem – especially plastic waste found in oceans across the world, in our bodies and foods. David Attenborough's Blue Planet film helped create a popular movement. China banned most waste imports forcing industry to act here. Surfers against Sewage launched plastic-free communities and the Big Plastic Count. Shoppers paid for plastic bags.

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8. 2013 Ellen MacArthur Foundation launches the circular economy network

The circular economy idea is that waste can be a starting point for new materials, and is driven by design that eliminates waste, circulates materials and regenerates nature. The UK-based Ellen MacArthur Foundation is a global leader in this work.

As household waste recycling became the norm, more was being done to tackle waste along with global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

7. 2003 Household Waste Recycling Act

This Act followed a long campaign by FoE and Wastewatch, requiring all councils in England to provide recycling collections. Larger businesses moved in and most community enterprises ended their work. In 2000 the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) was set up to develop markets for recycled materials.

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6. Communities leading the way

By 2002 over 850 community organisations provided 4.5 million households with some recycling services. Many worked for local councils that were keen to save landfill costs. Groups distributed over one million pieces of refurbished furniture to low-income homes each year.



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1. 1971 A bottle deposit scheme in the UK ended

This was unpopular. In protest, the newly-founded Friends of the Earth (FoE) dumped almost 1000 non-returnable bottles outside the head office of Schweppes. FoE local groups built wastepaper mountains, pushing for a national recycling scheme – the first time that word was widely used.

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2. 1977 1st bottle bank launched in Barnsley

If people were to recycle they would need somewhere to do it. The first banks collected 500 tonnes of glass in the first six months.

3. 1979 Community schemes kick-start recycling

Environmental groups started local newspaper collections. Avon FoE formed as a community enterprise in Bristol, and over time extended material collected to textiles, tins, glass, plastics and food.

4. 1989 Recycling City sets up doorstep recycling schemes in four cities

Voluntary activity was not enough. Following in the footsteps of the Avon group, FoE started the Recycling City initiative, working with councils to set up further doorstep collections. Some were run by community enterprises. The 1990 Environmental Protection Act introduced measures.



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5. 1990 Office waste recycling starts

Paper Round – a company launched by FoE – started collecting paper from London offices and became a successful independent company. In 1992, the national Community Recycling Network was set up to help community recycling enterprises work together.

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From rubbish dumps to recycling and the circular economy

The environmental movement emerged in the 1970s as consumer spending grew, along with concern about the 'throwaway society'. Little waste was reused and cities had 'rubbish dumps'.



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